

weekly worker



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Tory fat cats

Hot on the heels of the news of the British Gas chairman's very-nice-thank-you pay rise, it appears that another set of parasites are not doing too badly out of Tory policy.

Chief executives of newly formed National Health Service trusts have taken pay rises of anything up to 27.8% this year.

The average earnings increase was 6.6%, while the average rise of doctors, nurses and ancillary workers was only 3%.

The gap between the rich and the low paid is widening. Many are actually seeing their wages fall in real terms. But the heads of privatised utilities and government quangos are getting fat while we are told to tighten our belts, pay bigger fuel bills, pay for prescriptions and sit for months on hospital waiting lists - because supposedly there are too many hospitals!

Scrap private education!

Workers need the very best for our children. That means a completely free education system, the ending of privilege for the rich and the taking over of private schools under workers' control

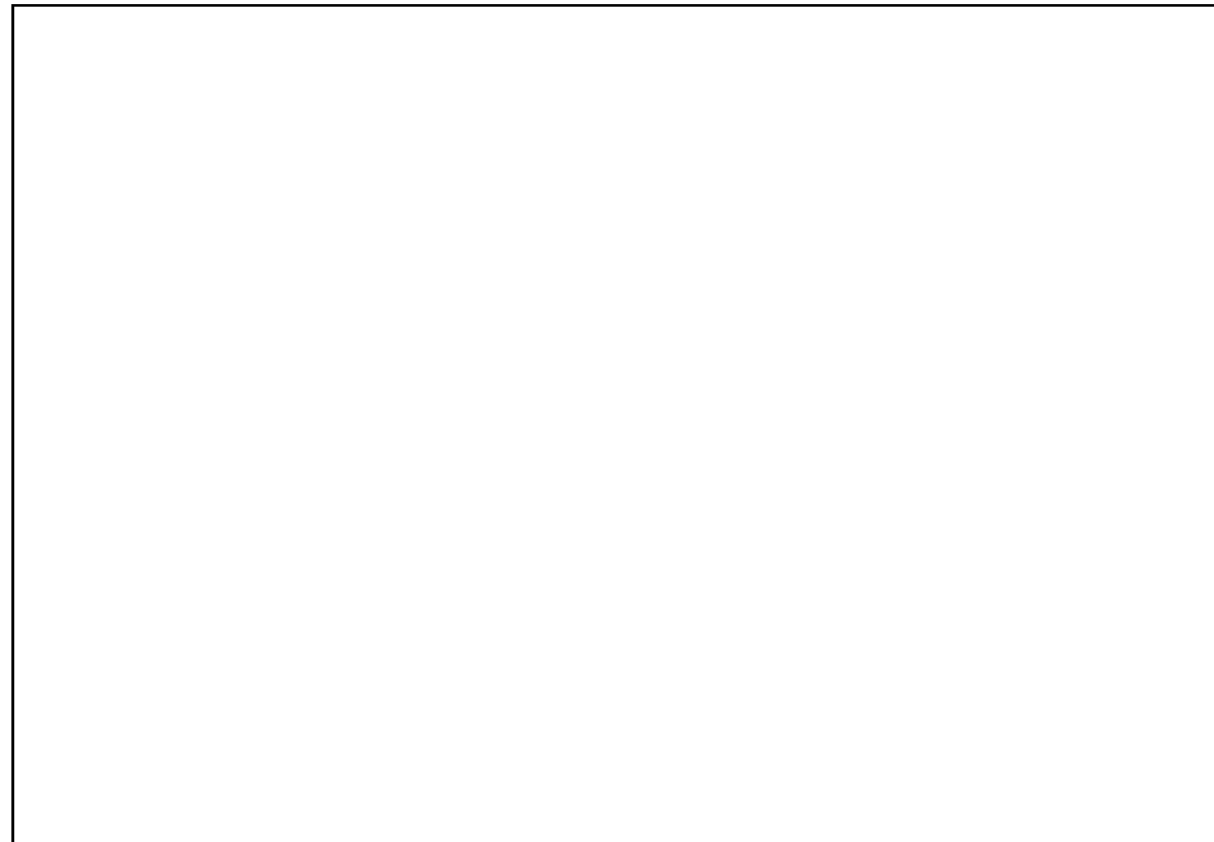
LABOUR earned a rare black mark from the British establishment at the beginning of 1995 after its education spokesman, David Blunkett, had stated on January 1 that the party might impose Vat on private school fees. Just two hours later, on the instructions of party leader Tony Blair, he was forced to backtrack and the possibility was "no longer in the frame".

The Tories had complained furiously that daring to tax *their* school fees was "the politics of envy". Of course slapping Vat on fuel bills, a measure which reduces many old and poor working class families to desperation, is considered perfectly acceptable. But Labour, not wishing to alienate the huge support it is recently enjoying from the rich and privileged, decided to rule out Vat on school fees "in order to avoid confusion".

Similarly that other 'leftwing' stalwart, Margaret Beckett, the shadow health minister, dismissed the possibility of Vat on private healthcare.

The row follows Blair's decision to send his son to a grant-maintained school and the Labour Party's acceptance that capitalism can no longer afford a universally free education system. Once in government, the party is likely to make students pay at least part of their university fees either by imposing a graduate tax or by extending the Tory student loans scheme.

However Blunkett's gaffe is unlikely to diminish Labour's acceptability in the eyes of the ruling class. As *The Independent's* editorial put it, "It is true that Conservative policies have been



Little rich kids learning today how to exploit workers tomorrow

shamelessly plundered ... Yet ... Labour has demonstrated that it is setting a fresh agenda rather than simply stealing from and catching up with the Conservatives" (December 29).

Arch strike-breaker Rupert Murdoch, head of News International, appears likely to throw the full weight of his gutter press behind Tony Blair at the next election, and CBI president Bryan Nicholson has indicated that most of Britain's capitalists would be perfectly happy with the new-look Labour Party. "They have shifted their ground very substantially," he

said, "and it would be churlish not to say so."

Our rulers are delighted that Labour is so clearly meeting their needs and will not lift a finger against their privileges. The working class has no interest in elitist establishments which the mass of society is barred from using. Our interest lies in seizing control of these schools and putting the best facilities and teachers to use in educating the whole of society, not just the few privileged rich.

We need universal, free education, not elitist 'centres of excellence' for the bosses.

Fighting fund

THE SIGHT of people collecting for charity reminds me of Jesus telling Martha that it was alright splashing expensive perfume on his feet because "the poor are always with us". He certainly had a point. Every Christmas the charities throw themselves into their work only to return the following year, saying that things are even worse. Truly, faith, hope and charity are not enough.

What can turn the tide? Without revolutionary consciousness and practice workers can never raise themselves above the level of wage slaves. With it they can rule the world, get rid of poverty, exploitation and suffering. There is no other course, but it cannot be done without a Communist Party. Building the Party has to be foremost in our plans.

Party building is tied to fundraising like Prometheus to a rock. Ideally fundraising should raise the party's banner and class consciousness but we also have a print shop and do car boot sales to pay our bills. We have no choice but to run things on a shoe string. However our plans must be based on what the class needs, not on what we can afford.

This Christmas comrades were out campaigning on working class issues. When we take our politics onto the street in this way we win the hearts and minds of our class in a much more significant way than the charities. Workers may not be ready to fight yet, but they are more interested in real change than handouts.

Comrades in London who were out every day raised over £1,000 in just two weeks. Special mention must go to LB and SK for outstanding results. But if we are to reach our political target we need to raise more and raise it regularly. For this reason supporters from all around the country must learn from the excellent example of the comrades in London and make fundraising a central task in branch activity. A problem shared is a problem halved. Now we have our £3,000 January target in our sights.

Phil Kent

Fighting for disabled rights in '95

DIRECT ACTION NETWORK, which fights for the rights of people with disabilities, is stepping up its action in '95 after scoring a victory to get all new buses made wheelchair-accessible.

Despite the new proposed legislation Dan still considers it important to keep the pressure up all year. A massive two day national action is planned in Cardiff, home to Neil Kinnock who is now European commissioner on transport policy.

For details of the action in Cardiff and for accommodation contact Julie Marsh on 0222-704906

Dan organising meeting: Saturday January 21, 3pm-6pm, Camden Street Community Centre, 30 Camden Street, London, NW1

Labour protects bosses' privilege!

Reply to our critics

Reprinted from *Communist Action*
No4 editorial

WELL, WELL, WELL ... Old Len certainly seems to have rattled somebody's cage. Schoolboy Latin, a pile of inverted commas, and as much r-r-revolutionary breast beating and peck-flexing as you could hope for. Is that really the best The Leninist could offer in reply to us? Evidently so.

Conrad complains that the limitations of space make his argument "sketchy" and "angular". We apologise for cramping his style. Naively enough, we had thought offering his organisation up to 3,000 words to reply to an article of barely 2,000 words was fairly generous, especially since his own organisation was mentioned only twice in the original article, and then only really in passing. Perhaps he could have come to a closer approximation to his normal less sketchy, more rounded style had he not wasted so many of his 3,000 words on his pointless "introductory remarks" and had proceeded to get "down to business" straight off.

Presumably, though, Conrad puts considerable store in these "introductory remarks". He and his associates certainly went to great lengths to implore us not to trim so much as a word from the angular text they sent us: despite our public statement that we would print their reply in full, Stan Kelsey saw the need to offer us an ultimatum: "The article should not be cut or amended. If you do not wish to print it in full, then do not print it at all." That certainly told us. Like the man who boards the bus, pays his fair, and then demands that the conductor print his ticket "in full or not at all", Stan definitely knows how to get what he wants. And then Conrad, temporarily forgetting the limited space we have imposed on him, waxes rhetorical with his "we are sure that you, unlike certain associates of yours, do not consider that reason for political censorship."

Rest assured, Jack, that your confidence in us on this point is fully grounded. But which associates of ours were you referring to? We really have no idea. If you have a gripe with another organisation, raise it with them. Don't waste your precious words on it here - it will only make your real arguments more sketchy and angular, and none of us would want that, would we?

This business about censorship and associates was not the only thing that puzzled us in Conrad's not-to-be-trimmed introduction. What was this about "better-late-than-never"? Perhaps Jack is mixing us up with someone else, so let us put the record straight. The Communist Action Group was formed a little over a year ago. If it hurts Conrad's feelings that we did not proceed immediately to request "serious polemic" (his inverted commas) then once again we apologise, though the delay does not seem excessive. For the record, though, we have voiced criticisms of Conrad's organisation before - in issue two, where we argued that their characterisation of the Soviet Union borrowed too heavily from Trotsky's analysis. "It is not possible to go beyond Trotskyism if we rely on [Trotsky's] categories", we argued, adding that "this is precisely what the comrades of The Leninist (now the self-styled Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB) have done." Conrad no doubt thinks we should have come out with all guns blazing in issue one. We are sorry to have disappointed him.

Conrad seems to have in mind a more personal "belatedness", namely that of Len Holloway. Perhaps the NCP could confirm whether or not they expelled someone by that name for attending a Leninist seminar in the late 1980s. I rather doubt that they did. It is true that three Central Committee Members of the NCP did attend such a seminar in 1990. None were expelled, though a whole series of ridiculous accusations were thrown at them. For the record, all three resigned, and the NCP leadership (which subsequently made much of the revelations to imply a Leninist-inspired plot lay behind the resignations) only found out about their attending the seminar after the resignations, through reading it in The Leninist. Conrad suspects that one of the three now signs his articles Len Holloway. But why is he so keen to establish the "true" identity behind this pseudonym? Of what possible concern is this to him? Frankly, Jack, you should mind your own business.

Conrad also seems to get a bit confused when he chides us for "organising separately from the Provisional Central Committee" and for "forming splits on the basis of electoral work." Come again? Communist Action was not a split from anyone, and certainly not from Conrad's organisation. It was formed by comrades from various backgrounds, none of which had been a member of a group claiming to be Communist for at least a year.

Conrad asks why we didn't opt for organising ourselves under the banner of the CPGB(PCC). The answer is simple: we were all active in campaigns as individuals with communist views; in none of those campaigns had the comrades of the CPGB(PCC) made any lasting, positive contribution. As the time we formed the CAG, the CPGB(PCC) wasn't even working in any of the campaigns we were active in, though they had made a brief, and symptomatic, appearance within the ranks of Afa in the run-up to the 1992 election campaign. To have joined their organisation, to have worked under their discipline, would have meant to have dropped the work we were doing, and instead to have concentrated exclusively on building their "Party".

Let us take the example of Afa. We considered then, as we consider now, that it was important to

The autumn 1994 issue of *Communist Action* carried an article by Jack Conrad (also published in the *Weekly Worker*) and an instantaneous reply by its editorial board. We reprint this below, alongside Jack Conrad's further response. The figure below shows the number of words in each article.

Party - for and against

fight fascism, not simply in words but also in the literal sense of the term. How you go about this is a concrete question. Empirically, is there any group which actually does this? Is there an organisation that really does combine ideological and physical confrontation? Yes there is, namely Anti-Fascist Action. That is why we were in it, and why we continue to try to build it. Conrad calls this "tailing after the anarchistic Red Action", and adds that Afa reflects "a terroristic impatience", a charge which he lays at our own door in the columns of his paper, *Weekly Worker*. All it is, he argues, is "physical force SWPism". By contrast, for Conrad the real militant anti-fascists adopt a different approach: instead of fighting fascism now, they patiently put such terrorism aside until they have reformed the CPGB, which will then be able to build workers defence squads, smash the fascists and overthrow capitalism. That's the proper way: proceed from the head down, that is from his head down.

Conrad charges the CAG in general and comrade Holloway in particular with having an "up-side down method", of "political weakness", of "pandering to backward prejudice", of "anarchistic boycottism", of "the worst type of clowning", of "behaving like a sect", of "bottom-up localism", of being "splitters" and even of being "terroristic." Harsh words. All this for having the temerity to insist that it is important to actually fight fascism in the here and now, rather than postpone it till you are stronger or content yourself with verbal bombastics.

According to him, we should give up militant anti-fascism and instead apply to join his organisation, where if accepted we would have the right to form a faction which could then argue in favour of anti-fascism rather than actively participating in it. No thanks, Jack.

This is the heart of what separates us: our approach is based on the need to make a difference, not just make a noise. It is what you do that matters, not what you say. Your approach is the reverse: the most important thing for you is to put out propaganda. But the problem facing communists today is not principally that people have not heard the case for communism. It is that people do not take communism seriously any more. The left is a sick joke in most working class areas: it is at best irrelevant. Long on words, short on action, the left does little to show that it really means business. You see this as a matter of communism being "unpopular". In a sense, this is correct, but there is more to it than that. The left is seen, quite correctly as it happens, as being spineless and ineffective.

We pose a simple question to you: what does your electoral propaganda do to counter this? What else do you do at election time except make propaganda? What do you do that would make working class people realise that communism is a force to be reckoned with, a party of action rather than just words, that communists are different from the feckless middle class left like the SWP and the other Trotskyists? This is a serious question, and one which demands an answer.

You castigate us for declaring that "under no circumstances" would we support your candidates. This is a distortion of what we really said in our article. As a matter of fact, we said that communists should ask any organisation fielding a candidate what precisely they intended to do beyond making propaganda for their own party, and if their answer was nothing, then we should send them on their way. Where such candidates were willing to engage in real, long-term work within the working class, communists should lend them critical support. What we refuse to countenance, "under any circumstances" is precisely the kind of campaign of stunts and self-publicity that groups like the RCP and yourselves have engaged in previously. If all that was intended was to pretend you were the party and promote yourselves, then we would have nothing to do with such clowning about. That is what we said.

In other words, we put conditions on our support for any candidate. We demand that they take seriously the job of communist organisation and militancy. Take for example one of the campaigns which you refer to: the 1992 general election campaign in Bethnal Green and Stepney. This is an area where the fascists have a strong base within certain sections of the white working class, a base upon which they have been able to build in the two years since that election. They are now a serious political force in the area, as witnessed by their electoral performance in May this year. To stand as a communist in such an area is a serious matter, comrades. The fascists are not like the Tories or Labour: they do not play by the rules of bourgeois democracy. They get physical. If you stand against them, as you did in 1992, you have to take them on. Putting up posters, sending out election addresses and occasionally painting slogans on walls are all well and good - contrary to your insinuations, we too think communist propaganda an excellent thing - but to make a break through you need to show that you are different from the likes of the SWP. You have to show that you are

capable of defending yourselves on the street - on paper sales, on canvassing, in public meetings. Because if you turn up in the street and the fascists run you, which happens to the SWP with monotonous regularity, who is going to take you seriously? Today, both communists and the fascists, in their counterposed ways, talk the language of the disgruntled Labour voter - we are aiming, in part, at the same audience. To win the hearts and minds of the workers, we need to show that we, too, can be a party of action.

What would that have meant in Tower Hamlets in 1992 (and today)? It would have meant physically confronting the fascists - not alone, as you would not have had the forces, but in conjunction with other militant anti-fascists. It would have meant publicly associating yourself with Anti-Fascist Action, joining in its activities, building and strengthening its organisation. Had you done that, there were not a few members of East London Afa at the time who would have supported you more fully, who would have welcomed the chance to work for a genuine revolutionary candidate prepared to get stuck in.

For a while, it looked as though you were going to do just that. Your comrades joined Afa locally, helped with Afa activities, albeit on a limited scale (you, too, have rather anaemic forces, it would appear), and even participated in the expulsion of the disruptive Revolutionary Internationalist League from the branch. Your comrades duly won support from militant anti-fascists as a result.

Then something disastrous happened - though perhaps not something entirely unpredictable. In the run up to Afa's hugely successful Unity Carnival in Hackney, your organisation's representative at the stewards meeting pledged 30 people on the day to help with organising and security. Given the threat of fascist attack and disruption of the event, this pledge was very welcome. It showed how communists could make a difference, could strengthen any campaign they were involved in. It showed that communists were not solely concerned with making propaganda for themselves.

And how many of the 30 communist stalwarts turned up on the day? Four. True, a couple of them helped put out a few tables to be used as stalls, but their main activity was to run the CPGB(PCC) stall - and even that was packed up before the end, so that the comrades could attend an internal meeting.

Thankfully, your organisation's gross irresponsibility and sectarianism did not have the grave consequences for the planned event that it might have had. Other organisations within Afa had taken your comrade's pledge with a pinch of salt, and made sure that enough security stewards were on hand on the site of the carnival from the early hours of the morning on to secure the area. Had they taken the comrade at his word, 30 stewards would have been deployed elsewhere, either in reconnaissance work or some other task, and the carnival site would have been left vulnerable. We leave it to readers to judge who it was who "ran away", to use Conrad's words.

An organisation which behaves in the way you did in Afa is indeed acting like clowns, is indeed making matters worse, is indeed - to the extent to which it does not change its course - part of the problem, not of the solution.

Hardly surprisingly, those comrades who had been assisting in your election work through fly-posting and other ways, were alienated by this prank of yours. Hardly surprisingly, any pledges they had made to you were considered null and void. Hardly surprisingly, instead of joining forces with you, some of those comrades chose later to participate in the foundation of the CAG.

You quote your own comrade, Mark Fischer, as saying that working class people dismiss those who do not stand in elections as mere sellers of fringe papers. He is no doubt correct in so far as he is referring to the 57 varieties of British Trotskyism. What we fail to understand is how he can draw any comfort from the fact that the same people regard those such as yourselves who stand in elections as "politicians." Perhaps its different in the Rhondda, but where we come from the word is used as a term of abuse, not respect.

You refer to the NCP, Straight Left, Communist Liaison and ourselves as "Stalinite"? This is a new one on us. What do you mean by it? That we consider that socialism was built in the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership? If so, we plead guilty. Or perhaps that we consider that the CPSU took a decidedly rightist turn after Stalin died? Again, we confess our guilt. That we are opposed to Trotskyism? You've got us again. Do you have anything else in mind? Though we are unfamiliar with the term, the tone with which you wield it and its similarity to the more usual term "Stalinist" leads us to think that it is meant as an insult. Your further clarification would be welcome - same terms as usual, 3,000 words (uncut) and as angular as you like.

You think we are a bit soft on the NCP et al, and tell of our unrequited courtship of them and other

groups. You further tell us of the presence of evidence in the first three issues of our journal to support this contention. Perhaps you could be more specific. You seem particularly narked that we described you as part of the problem, but only remarked that the other groups had misunderstood the history of communism. We had no idea that your feelings would be hurt in this way, so let us clear this one up once and for all.

For one thing, we do not consider it to be such a "tender" understanding of such groups to castigate them for failing to understand the cardinal lessons of Marxism-Leninism with respect to social democracy. If you are in any doubt as to whether we think they are part of the problem, let us remind you that in the very article you were meant to be replying to, we stated unequivocally that communism can only be reformed in Britain "in struggle against Labourism not through compromise with it." Further, we spell it out that "if all we can do is to tell ex-Labour supporters to take a deep breath and vote for more of the same old medicine, we will fail." In case there is a shadow of doubt in your minds still, we believe that if you call for a vote for the Labour Party under the present circumstances, that is unless it is a matter of Labour being converted (either locally or nationally) into a genuine fighting force for the working class, you are part of the problem and that if you strategically refuse as a point of principle to countenance the standing of genuine communist candidates, you have failed to understand even the ABCs of Marxism.

Similarly, it remains a mystery to us how you could in all seriousness wonder if we "secretly fear communist candidates will split the vote and let [the fascists] in." To be honest Jack, on your recent electoral performance there has been precious little threat of that. In any case, our article was quite explicit on the issue: where this happens, we said, "Labour will point to the left as being responsible for letting a fascist win an election. But this argument is nonsense." We went on to point out that it is above all in the sort of areas where the fascists are currently building, "that is to say run-down working class areas which have been ignored and betrayed by Labour for decades that we must challenge reformism. If we refuse to on the grounds that it will split the working class vote, we are effectively abandoning these areas, which should be the natural constituency for Communism and indeed where Communism was once strong, to the far-right." How can Conrad see in this clear, Marxist-Leninist argument, any traces of the theory of the lesser of two evils? Or perhaps Conrad was too busy making "mass propaganda for communism" to read the article?

But then the comrade seems to have a habit of reading what is not there. For example, he mocks us for having described East London as a "red base." We shan't bother to ask him where he might have come across this argument in our press: he has simply invented it.

Finally, to return to this question of the Party. Conrad says comrade Holloway "complains" that his organisation has a Provisional Central Committee and that his comrades "refer" variously to the Communist Party, the CPGB and our Party." Actually, comrade Holloway wrote something rather different: he did not object to anyone talking about the CPGB, the Party and so on. His point was rather narrower - he objected to your organisation's posturing on the matter. You do not simply refer to the CPGB, nor do you simply refer to yourselves as "the continuation of the CPGB" (your formulation): no, you refer to yourselves as the CPGB. And there is the rub. You are not the CPGB. If you are successful in your endeavours, which is impossible unless you change your ways, you will eventually be able to call yourselves the CPGB with some degree of honesty. Until that time, it is dishonest to talk as if you were a party. The fact is that the CPGB has been liquidated, a result which has, to use your phrase, "been produced by life itself." This, Jack, "is an objective fact."

Lenin's position was very different from your own, as you are fully aware. Though the party structure, and in particular the original leadership, were smashed, still there remained the cells of the organisation up and down the country. The history of British Communism has been quite different. There is no longer a party waiting to be pulled back together. It has gone. We need to reforge a Communist Party in this country, not just piece it together again.

You tell us that your criticisms of our electoral approach are intended for our own benefit, as opposed to yours. Maybe, in which case your altruism is admirable. For our part, we think your time would be better spent critically looking at your own practice in this respect. To borrow your phrase, it is surely not irreversible. Your comrades can make an effective contribution to rebuilding communism as a material force here in Britain, but it is our opinion that this can only happen on the basis of a fundamental reorientation of your tactics.

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Communist unity for you is a matter of other groups dissolving themselves into yours, with a formal guarantee of certain rights. For us, in the present conditions the necessary precondition to any kind of meaningful, lasting communist unity has to be unity in action around specific demands. In the absence of that, communist polemics, however much they succeed in clarifying , will not achieve much.

Our group identified three areas of work as priorities, in addition to trade union and solidarity work: Ireland, Cuba and anti-fascism. We propose that we move on now to mapping out ways in which we can co-operate in these spheres. For our part, we invite you to join Anti-Fascist Action and to commit yourself to building this organisation, to discuss with us ways in which our solidarity with the Cuban people can be given a concrete form, and to explore ways in which we can work together on Ireland. If these pathways can be productively explored, we feel certain that your organisation’s candidates in future elections will be meeting the criteria for our support which we stipulated in our original article.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Reply to a reply

Jack Conrad

IN HIS letter to us Len Holloway, the leading spokesperson of Communist Action Group, offered “serious polemic” on the election question (*Weekly Worker* August 4 1994). If genuine, a big step forward for him. However, I feared his idea might be to feign openness and score a few cheap points in the attempt to justify the sectarian existence of CAG. That is why, in my introductory remarks, I said that for a “serious polemic” it would be necessary to take up the arguments presented in our book, *In the enemy camp*.

Here, unfolded historically and logically, is the Marxist-Leninist theoretical understanding of parliament and the communist approach to bourgeois elections. A narrative that leads to the inescapable conclusion that those committed to reforing the CPGB should today regard it as *obligatory* to fight Labourism in its lair no matter what we lack at present by way of resources and mass support.

I went on, in my article, to briefly illustrate the progress we have made for the Party in local, regional, Westminster and European election campaigns. I also countered CAG’s misconceptions, or misrepresentations, concerning communist propaganda, Labourism, branch building, anti-fascism, etc. In conclusion it was submitted that while CAGers have important political differences with the majority of Communist Party members, which should not be glossed over, they ought to unite with them under the banner of the Provisional Central Committee as a faction. To borrow the words of a celebrated communist *politician*: “Freedom of discussion, unity of action - this is what we must strive to achieve” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, 1977, p380). Without raising the theoretical level of debate, without insisting upon the centrality of the Party, without showing the successes we have had in reforing the CPGB, without presenting a concrete proposal for rapprochement with the PCC, the danger was that this small disorientated ‘official communist’ group would go still further adrift.

Communist Action No4 therefore made sad reading. My “cage” was not “rattled”, as they somewhat curiously boasted. Nor did their ‘Reply to our critics’ deliver the intended knockout blow. More than undergraduate sarcasm is required to do that. There was a clear victor. It was not Conrad though. It was sectarianism. Their sectarianism triumphed over their professed Partyism.

Refusing to deal with *In the enemy camp*, CAG was almost pathologically concerned with justification and defensive point scoring. Incredibly this included getting upset with our comrade Stan Kelsey’s covering note. He said there should be no amendments to, or cuts from, the article we submitted to *Communist Action*. As it turned out a rash of howlers were *introduced* alongside at least one significant *deletion*. Evidentially poor transcription, not censorship. Never-theless our worries were “fully grounded” (unamended and uncut, ‘Propaganda for communism’ can be found in the *Weekly Worker* of September 15 1994).

CAG got even more upset with my remark that Holloway’s offer of “serious polemic” - his words by the way - was “better-late-than-never”. CAG accuses me of wanting to “establish the ‘true’ identity” behind his pseudonym. Of what “possible concern” is it to you? “Mind your own business,” we were indignantly told.

Of course, I know Holloway’s “true” identity and, as a matter of principle, not to say old friendship, would do nothing to jeopardise his security. No, what I was alluding to was Holloway’s wildly vacillating and rather ludicrous political record. Given his easy dismissal of the “feckless” left

and claims to be a man-others-should-follow, that is of concern. It is indeed the business of the entire workers’ movement. Not surprisingly CAG is not keen on such openness. Apparently the New Communist Party “never” expelled anyone called “by that name”. And for my part I am sure that neither the Labour Party nor the Spartacist League have record of such a person. I have a shrewd suspicion that the same goes for the Euro wing of the CPGB.

The Leninist wing of the CPGB definitely never had a Len Holloway. But in the 1980s a supporter did quit our ranks without giving his comrades an inkling of why he had to leave them. It is no secret among us that this man-others-should-follow went on to arrive and then depart from the Euro organisation in similar fashion. He then popped up a short while later in the NCP. Following elevation to its central committee he edited its turgid Gorbachevite paper, *The New Worker*. (Frankly Sherlock Holmes would be hard pressed to discover when exactly he took command - *Communist Action* is an improvement.)

Anyway in 1990 he and two other dissident NCP central committee members appeared at one of our London seminars. We were naively assured the NCP would soon be transformed. There would be a revolutionary coup at its forthcoming congress. As things transpired, I believe I am right in saying, all three resigned *before* the congress; true to form without hint of polemic. After they had so done, Jack Conrad published a fraternal criticism. Without animus they were reminded of our warning - nothing would come of conspiracies. Something must have struck home. In the ensuing period the individual referred to above attended CPGB seminars and meetings and began moving in a Partyist direction; he was humbled into promising several hundred pounds to our Summer Offensive. Then something disastrous happened - though perhaps not something entirely unpredictable. Without going into print the comrade again careered off in an anti-Party trajectory; this time through Anti Fascist Action, where he now heads what might be called its Stalin Society faction.

All things considered, it is disingenuous then for CAG to present itself as simply the coming together of honest communist activists and to say it was “not a split from anyone”. CAG results from many *dishonest* splits. Writing that it was formed “by comrades from various backgrounds, none of which had been a member of a group claiming to be communist for at least a year,” is a mere textual ploy. Sure, one or two come from quite exotic backgrounds. Sure, none had been in a communist organisation for at least one year. But what about the years before? CAG does not want to admit that the long course plied by its founder-leader (and he is not untypical) has been one of consistent vacillation, which at no point has involved “serious polemic”.

So why was CAG formed? Why did the comrades refuse to join with the PCC in reforing the CPGB? The answer, inasmuch as it is given in *Communist Action*, is rather revealing. “We were all active in campaigns as individuals with communist views; in none of the campaigns had the CPGB (PCC) made any lasting contribution.” Digging themselves deeper into the sectarian hole they continue: “At the time we formed the CAG, the CPGB (PCC) wasn’t even working in any of the campaigns we were active in, though they had made a brief, and symptomatic, appearance within the ranks of Afa in the run-up to the 1992 election campaign.” According to CAG, “to have joined their organisation, to have worked under their discipline, would have meant to have dropped the work we were doing, and instead to have concentrated exclusively on building their ‘Party’.”

So the comrades put “campaigns” above the task of reforing the CPGB. If they had become Party members, as urged, there is no reason to believe that this would have meant dropping their ongoing work. Surely the unity of communists gives weight and certainly coordination and direction. Even if, after full debate - yes, in our press, in front of the class - a majority decided collective work should take a different direction, that would not amount to a matter of principle - ie, an issue which might make a split legitimate. But it would be perfectly permissible to form a faction, and that would have been their prerogative. Communists cannot put “campaigns” above reforing the CPGB and remain communists. Those who do objectively become anti-Party and join the liquidationist camp of pseudo-communists.

“Communist unity for you,” CAG informs us, “is a matter of other groups dissolving themselves into yours, with a formal guarantee of certain rights.” In contrast, for CAG it is an unrequited “unity in action around specific demands”: namely, “trade union work”, “Ireland, Cuba and anti-fascism”. “If,” it ridiculously declares, “these pathways can be productively explored, we feel certain that your organisation’s candidates in future elections will be meeting the criteria for our support.” Unity in action is, of course, what counts for communists. We have no truck with pub room revolutionaries or academic poseurs. Under present-day conditions communists are duty bound to energetically unite in democratically decided centralised actions which are subordinated entirely to the *main general task* of reforing the CPGB. Trade union work, Irish and Cuban solidarity, anti-fascism and, we might add, unemployment, anti-militarism and elections - all campaigns we have conducted to a greater or lesser degree in exemplary fashion - are secondary matters. Taken as discrete or test items, they should not and cannot provide the criteria or basis for communist unity.

Contemptibly CAG explicitly puts membership of the Red Action-dominated East London Afa above membership of the CPGB (this and the statement in *Communist Action* No1 as to where they were “based” is why I innocently dubbed East London CAG’s ‘red base’). How does it excuse itself? Where CAG wants to “make a difference” with Afa, supposedly the CPGB only wants to “make a noise” with communist propaganda. Jack Conrad himself is falsely accused of not wanting anti-fascists to physically and ideologically confront the fascists. “Instead of fighting fascism now,” the PCC is said to “patiently put such terrorism aside until they have reformed the CPGB, which will then be able to build workers’ defence squads, smash the fascists and overthrow capitalism.” This caricature is both inept and cynical.

It is correct that outside the period of direct and open military confrontation we reject, as leftist, the tactic of terrorism. However the PCC is certainly in favour of providing an ideological alternative to fascism and, as stated by myself in *Communist Action*, building defence corps to protect the working class from attack. But fascism cannot be smashed without revolution. Of that we are sure. It is a form of the capitalist state.

Standing CPGB candidates naturally involves and is primarily concerned with disseminating propaganda. CAG dismisses such vital work as “disastrous” because in its demoralised and philistine environment somehow promoting and getting votes for communism discredits the left among workers. For them cracking the head of some BNP dupe - even if it is vicariously - is worth any number of election addresses and presumably new Party supporters. Pursuing its terroristic theme, CAG asks whether communist propaganda can overcome what it considers the *principal problem* for communists - ie, that people see the left as “spineless and ineffective”. This, it says, is a “serious question, and demands a serious answer”. Very well, my friends. Here it is.

How communists use bourgeois elections is a well established tactic. To overcome illusions in parliament - stand for parliament. For relatively small cost we can test the level of our support and use the election “as a platform for revolutionary ideas” (Comintern 2nd Congress resolution). In essence elections are no different from selling papers on a Saturday morning or gaining air time on TV or the radio. Elections are merely a means to an end. Nevertheless they give us, under today’s conditions of reaction, an unequalled opportunity to make mass communist propaganda, mass propaganda far beyond the particular constituency concerned. Hence they are also an unequalled opportunity to gain recruits, make new branches and reorganise the Party nationally. That is why we put such emphasis on them.

Only with the reformed CPGB can we “make working class people realise that communism is a force to be reckoned with”, because only then will it be. Neither Afa nor any other well intentioned campaign can substitute for it. Because CAG does not recognise *in practice* that the *principal problem* for communists is reforing the CPGB; furthermore, because it puts campaigns to the fore, it states that “under no circumstances” would it support our candidates. Only if we “intended to go beyond propaganda”, only if our “candidates were willing to engage in real, long-term work within the working class”, and by inference only if they were willing to sponsor Afa terrorism, trail behind the Labourite Troops Out Movement, stand outside the US embassy alongside CAG, and carry out suitably routine trade union work would CPGB candidates earn its “critical support”. This is a combination of boycottism, localism, campaignism and pomposity.

It hardly needs saying but, for the benefit of CAG, we are in the process of conducting long term work within the working class. The CPGB will lead the proletariat to state power. In preparation, Party organisations working under the discipline of the PCC have and will continue to use in a systematic way every avenue to reforge the CPGB. We will undeviatingly utilise every opportunity to win, consolidate and train new forces for the Party. We will overcome the period of reaction by standing candidates to take advantage of Labour’s headlong flight to the right and the political vacuum that has opened up in British politics. We will also carry on an irreconcilable struggle against renegades and liquidators.

CAG’s centre of gravity is not the Party. It is in obsessive but elliptical orbit round the BNP. At perihelion, instead of supporting communist candidates it preferred to expend its “energies” “upsetting the fascist election campaign” (*Communist Action* No3). At aphelion, it says that for the CPGB to stand in such a constituency as Bethnal Green and Stepney we would *have to* take on the BNP physically. The CPGB could not have done that alone “as you would not have the forces”, says a bumptious CAG. It would have to be “in conjunction with other militant anti-fascists” (*Communist Action* No4).

CAG can boycott the general or any other bourgeois election citing the BNP. That is its right. As for ourselves we will not be and were not cowed. In 1992 the CPGB stood in Bethnal Green and Stepney. Obviously a “breakthrough” was not expected. But a beginning was made. Should that beginning have been put off because we are not yet strong enough to defeat the BNP? To do that would be criminal. It would put off the day when we can physically crush the BNP (something Afa is unable to do in London’s East End because it is not a *political* alternative - surely the CAG now admits that). By standing in 1992 we began the

work of presenting the “disgruntled Labour voter” with the communist alternative. Help would have been welcomed from the proto-CAG, as originally pledged, but we managed well enough without and faced off BNP thugs on the night of the count despite stretched forces.

Why did the proto-CAG decide to renege on its pledge of support? Here we arrive at the unexciting tale of the 26 missing stewards. One of our leading comrades, on his own volition, without collective discussion, promised 30 stewards for an Afa carnival in Hackney. This is true. It was also grossly irresponsible. We were in the run-up to the general election, with candidates in Wales and Scotland, besides London. Using 30 comrades as carnival stewards under such circumstances was posturing and, yes, clowning. That is why we reprimanded the comrade concerned and decided that only four comrades should be allocated.

How did the proto-CAG react to this extraordinarily minor footnote to the 1992 general election? Maybe the comrades found the excuse they were all the time waiting for. The poor things tell us they felt “alienated”; they felt that “pledges they had made were considered null and void”; they decided to look towards founding their own separate organisation.

It is inevitable that in the future our organisation will make all manner of small mistakes. Some of our leaders will act hastily and will even make foolish promises that cannot be fulfilled. That is unfortunate, but it is life. However, such instances should not be blown out of proportion, let alone used to form a split. Through debate, through criticism and self-criticism, mistakes and shortcomings must be unitedly dealt with and overcome. That is the communist way.

In passing, CAG queries our use of the term ‘Stalinite’ to describe them. Their editorial team says this is a “new one” for them; surprising given their John Williams article in defence of Louis Althusser, the French revisionist philosopher (*Communist Action* No2). Their real point however is that full socialism was successfully built in the Soviet Union “under Stalin’s leadership” and things started to go wrong only “after Stalin died” (*Communist Action* No4). If our starting point is the scientific theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and orthodox Marxism, then the notion that socialism - ie, the first stage of communism - was built in the USSR is an absurdity. We are more than willing to debate this with CAG. A preliminary stage in the recent development of my own thought on this complex theoretical problem can be found in the *Anti-Cliff* supplement printed in the *Weekly Worker* some 12 months ago. Readers might also be interested to know that I am working on a book that will deal comprehensively and logically with the categories, contradictions and laws of motion in Soviet society.

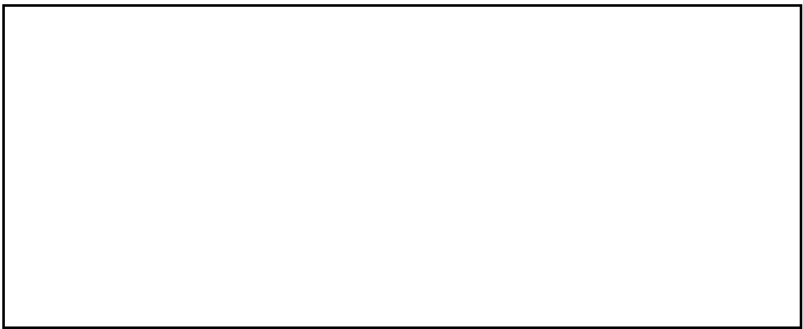
Finally and fittingly we return to the Party question. CAG forgets nothing and learns nothing. CAG can only repeat that there is no CPGB, and only if we are successful in reforing it could we use its name with “some degree of honesty”. Clearly I must go over the history of our Party once more.

The Leninist wing of the CPGB was formed in 1981. As an organised opposition it conducted independent Party work and independently recruited members to the Party. At its 5th Conference in November 1990 the Leninist wing of the CPGB elected a Provisional Central Committee. This was not “posturing”, as Holloway contends. It was an act of disciplined Party members carried out in the interests of the entire working class. With the *Morning Star* split and the Euros firmly set on the Democratic Left road, the CPGB had been almost totally liquidated organisationally. However we remained in militant fighting formation.

Our wing of the Party therefore not only captured the name of the CPGB. As the advanced section of a wrecked Party the responsibility devolved upon us to reforge it out of our wing. Because Holloway has no understanding or record of Party spirit, partisanship and morality, he grasps neither how nor why we remain members of the CPGB. Instead he joins Nina Temple, Fergus Nicholson, Tony Chater and other opportunists who would deprive us of our Party membership and Party duties.

As an aside I reminded CAG that “Lenin and the *Iskra* comrades faced a similar situation” after their RSDLP was liquidated by the Tsarist autocracy in 1898. “Their task, *as members of* a liquidated Party, was to revive it,” I said. In *Communist Action* this earned a supercilious ticking off: “Lenin’s position was very different as you are well aware”; there still remained “cells of the organisation up and down” Russia. In Britain the Party has “gone”; there is “no longer a party waiting to be pulled back together”.

Is Holloway telling us that if Lenin had been reduced to our position, where there were only some half a dozen Party organisations remaining, he would have meekly accepted the situation imposed on his Party by the Okhrana? Only a liquidator can say the CPGB has “gone”. The question is not whether the CPGB has in terms of actual practice been reduced fractionally to one-tenth or one-hundredth of its previous self. The question is whether we have carried on with our Party work. Undeniably we have. And, however modest, it does not equal nought. Comrade Holloway, you have not been criticising nothing. As Lenin told his liquidators: “Something that is non-existent cannot be appraised.” Partyism is by definition to improve, broaden and increase the fraction of the Party that remains. To call our work “harmful” and “disastrous” is treachery. Remember Plekhanov’s famous warning: “Those for whom our Party does not exist, do not exist for our Party.”



Bad year for rail

NINETEEN ninety-five looks like being a bad year for rail workers and passengers as privatisation gathers speed. Chris Green, director of Scotrail, has given a New Year's message to his workforce, telling them that up to 600 jobs could go as a direct result of the government's insistence that all 25 train operating companies cut their annual costs by 10%.

This has to be done without major timetable cuts, as even this government recognises that these would finish any remaining chance it had of winning the next election. They will come later.

Roger Salmon, director of Passenger Rail Franchising - the government quango responsible for 'maintaining' services and standards, has been setting out the minimum standard that any potential bidder will have to meet.

It is now obvious that this standard is going to be way below the previous level of service. Already the motorail services are to finish on May 28.

The overnight sleeper services, much used by Scottish MPs, are under threat. Sprinter trains with hardly any bike/luggage space and with reduced capacity will replace them.

Safety standards are also taking a battering. Railtrack has finally come

clean and declared that it will not be pursuing the introduction of Automatic Train Protection, considered essential after the Clapham crash and which prevented the Cowden collision. It will not expand the automatic warning system either.

This is justified on the grounds of cost effectiveness. Railtrack has actually budgeted for a percentage loss of life as acceptable. In Regional Railways North West a sprinter unit was persistently put back into service despite the driving cab filling with toxic fumes. The train crew had to go to Manchester Royal Infirmary, who told the driver that these fumes had the effect of glue sniffing.

Meanwhile the 'People's Party' cannot make its mind up on its policy towards rail privatisation. First it said it would restore the railways into British Rail Mark II. Then Tony said it would only give Roger Salmon more teeth. Now it has taken the usual stand and is saying nothing - 'we will make our policy known if we get elected'.

What a pity that it is mostly Labour MPs using the sleeper trains from Scotland. But then again they can afford to fly, unlike those they claim to represent.

Aslef member, North West

Bent coppers and strange deaths

OVER 150 angry protesters demonstrated outside Stoke Newington police station on the Friday before Christmas following the death of Shiji Lapite. Shiji died on December 16 in the back of a police van.

During the three hour demonstration protesters ignored the police barriers and blocked the main road. On the same day the British Embassy in Nigeria was also picketed by family and friends.

Local police have claimed that they arrested Shiji on suspicion of possessing drugs. When stopped, they claim, he threw away a bag which contained crack cocaine. However, his family has been given three different versions of his arrest and where the drugs were found.

What is not in doubt is that within 20 minutes of being put in the van he was dead. Shiji's family saw a number of marks on his body consistent with a beating, including cuts to the face. A

Home Office postmortem was inconclusive. Shiji's family has now organised a second examination and has arranged for an independent autopsy. Two plain clothes police officers have been suspended while an investigation is carried out.

From last summer police from the station have been regaining their reputation for violence. Since the early 70s a number of people have died in mysterious circumstances in the 'care' of Stoke Newington police.

An investigation into police corruption - 'Operation Jackpot' - has highlighted years of accusations about police corruption at the station, including the planting and selling of drugs.

Tony Coughlin

For information contact the
Shiji Lapite Campaign, PO
Box 273, London E7.
Tel 081-555 8151

Bus strikers sacked

ON NOVEMBER 18 last year, Eastern National, a subsidiary of privatised bus giant, Badgerline Holdings, sacked 96 bus drivers from the company's depot in Chelmsford. The drivers were sacked for taking part in a few hours of strike action in protest at excessive working hours, which the drivers felt were posing a serious threat, not only to their own health and safety, but to the safety of the travelling public as well. The company refused to enter serious talks.

On December 17 a rally was organised in support of the sacked drivers. Over 350 people marched through Chelmsford. Reps from

different bus companies around the country turned up to give support. Officials from the Transport and General Workers Union spoke, giving full support to the sacked workers, which now number 105, and also pledged to step up national support for their case.

Ken Reid, regional secretary of TGWU called for funds, and for the public not to travel on Badgerline buses.

Ally Hedley

If you have donations or
require speakers contact
Steve Argent on 0245 257655

Yeltsin's bid for domination

THE RUSSIANS are only the majority nationality in a state which includes hundreds of others. Many of these peoples resent Russian domination and some wish to break away. The Chechen rebellion is a tiny part of that picture.

Since the collapse of the USSR the new 'democratic' Russia has reached for its guns more than once to try and solve the problems flowing from the disintegration of bureaucratic socialism. But Yeltsin in reasserting Russia's influence in this crude and brutal way is winning few friends.

The Chechens have lived in the Caucasus for as long as records have existed, with an exception under Stalin, when they were deported en masse, accused of collaborating with the Nazis during their occupation of the Northern Caucasus in 1942.

After being allowed to return to their homeland by Krushchev in the late 1950s, the Chechens were bureaucratically integrated into the newly created Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which they shared with a closely related ethnic group, The Ingush.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the specifically Chechen part of the ASSR declared its independence, under Jokhar Dudayev, a former general in the Soviet army.

By itself, the declaration of independence would not guarantee conflict with Moscow. Many republics exist within the Russian Federation, possessing quite a lot of independence. The difference is that Chechnya does not regard itself as part of the Russian Federation, and Dudayev has been defying Yeltsin for the past three years.

Dudayev does not enjoy the support of all Chechens. A low intensity civil conflict existed even before the direct involvement of Russian troops. Much

of Eastern Chechnya is controlled by Umar Avturkhanov, a rival leader. Some of Dudayev's opponents openly say they want to ride on Russian tanks in a triumphal parade through Grozny, the capital. Much of the more effective opposition to Dudayev is probably being orchestrated by Moscow.

It is not entirely clear why matters have come to a head now. Perhaps Yeltsin feels strong enough in Moscow to flex his muscles on the fringes of the Russian Federation. He may fear other parts which are not ethnically Russian will follow Chechnya. An oil pipe line crosses the area and there are oil reserves, to provide an economic motive.

One justification advanced by Moscow for cracking down is lawlessness in Chechnya. A bulletin put out by the Moscow based Itar-Tass agency on December 16 said 600 murders were committed in the republic in 1994 out of a population of around one million. While there is a lot of organised crime and violence in Chechnya, the same is true of most parts of the country.

Both sides in this war are nationalist and pro-capitalist. The Chechens are a classic example of a non-historic people with a doomed reactionary dream. Nonetheless the right to self-determination means nothing unless it includes the right to be wrong. Rakovsky noted the reactionary role played by the Ruthagarians, a minority nationality in Poland in the 19th century, but in 1917 they answered the call of the workers in Petersburg a thousand miles to their north and fought for their real interests as Ukranian workers - with the revolution. We support the right of secession in order to strengthen the *voluntary* union of workers across nations.

Steve Kay

Blood on their hands

THE IRISH ruling class has resorted to installing a patchwork coalition government after Albert Reynolds' Fianna Fail-led administration fell at the end of last year.

Just before Christmas a new alliance of John Bruton's Fine Gael, Dick Spring's Labour Party and Proinsias de Rossa's Democratic Left was formed. Fine Gael is a Tory-type party and Democratic Left is made up of former 'communists', so at first sight this appears to be a very strange mixture. However, this is no last-ditch effort by a desperate ruling class attempting to hold back workers' revolution, as some odd-ball Trotskyite groupings are pretending. Tory, Labour and Democratic Left are all *bourgeois* parties committed to capitalism, and their coalition is a result of normal politicking, where the largest party had no majority, became discredited and was replaced by opponents.

The origins of Democratic Left can be traced back to the petty bourgeois Sinn Fein, and it has now come full circle via republicanism and 'official communism' back to mainstream capitalist politics.

After the split between the Official and Provisional strands of the republican movement, Official Sinn Fein ceased its armed struggle against the British while continuing to wage war against the Provisional IRA, thus lining itself up with the counter-revolutionary forces alongside British imperialism. As its degeneration continued overtures to the protestant working class became sops to loyalism. It adopted more and more 'socialist' rhetoric and in 1977 changed its name

to Sinn Fein, the Workers Party. It waged an internecine struggle against the breakaway Irish Republican Socialist Party, murdering its founder, Seamus Costello. In 1982 it dropped the Sinn Fein prefix and embraced pro-Soviet 'official communism'.

Because of its nationalist background, the Workers Party enjoyed some success in the South, where it had seven TDs (members of parliament) and many local councillors. However by the end of the decade it suffered the same split between Euros and centrists that had affected the entire world communist movement. In 1992 the majority of the leadership broke away after it failed to win a special delegate conference to its open ditching of Marxism and the class struggle. The Democratic Left, distancing itself both from its armed-struggle republican roots and communism, took with it six of the TDs and most of the councillors.

Today it is fully integrated into the liberal wing of the Irish bourgeoisie and will be keen to continue the attacks on the working class.

And that means more of the same cuts and closures, and the continuation of the imperialist-dominated 'peace process'.

Jim Blackstock

Bloody Sunday commemoration
Demonstrate for peace
through British withdrawal
Saturday January 28
Assemble at Platt Field, Manchester
Contact the march organising
committee on 071-609 1743

What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs, ie communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

We urge all who accept these principles to join us. A Communist Party Supporter reads and fights to build the circulation of the Party's publications; contributes regularly to the Party's funds and encourages others to do the same; where possible, builds and participates in the work of a Communist Party Supporters Group.

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